



**UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY**  
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**To:** Angela Gallagher, Bureau of Waste Site Cleanup, MassDEP

**From:** Ginny Lombardo, EPA Region 1 New Bedford Harbor Team Leader  
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**Date:** September 19, 2016

**Subj:** EPA Comments on:  
Phase III Remedial Action Plan – RTN 4-601  
Former Aerovox Facility, New Bedford, MA  
Prepared for AVX Corporation, Fountain Inn, SC  
Prepared by Brown and Caldwell, Andover, MA  
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EPA is providing comments on the above referenced document to MassDEP for DEP's consideration in its response to AVX on the Phase III for the Former Aerovox Facility. EPA's comments and concerns are founded on the necessity of a comprehensive final remedy at the former Aerovox facility that will ensure complete source control and management of migration for the Aerovox Site, effectively controlling or eliminating any further source of PCBs, VOCs or other contaminants from this facility over the long term to New Bedford Harbor sediments and waters.

As we have discussed, the timely selection, implementation and construction of the Aerovox facility remedy under the State's 21E cleanup is critical to the New Bedford Harbor Superfund cleanup. EPA's remediation requires the cleanup of the heavily contaminated Upper Harbor subtidal sediments immediately adjacent to the former Aerovox facility as a necessary predecessor to completing dredging of lower contaminated subtidal Upper Harbor areas and intertidal, saltmarsh and shoreline Upper Harbor cleanup, due to the significant risk of recontamination of those areas by the movement of highly contaminated sediments. However, EPA's remediation of these Aerovox near-shore sediments cannot proceed until the source areas, including DNAPL and highly contaminated soils along the eastern property boundary, and contaminated groundwater discharging to the river are effectively controlled. The new Remedial Action Contract (RAC) for the New Bedford Harbor Superfund Site is now in place and EPA is prepared to complete construction of the Superfund remedy. Delays to the Superfund remedy have significant implications to human health and the environment.

EPA looks forward to continuing to work with MassDEP on its evaluation of the Phase III and towards the selection of an acceptable comprehensive remedy as quickly as possible. EPA is committed to work with MassDEP, AVX and the City on this mutually important goal and to work with all parties on the coordination of both the 21E and

Superfund remedies to allow for the safe and effective construction of these joint remedial actions.


EPA offers the following comments on the Phase III:


General Comments:

1. On March 11, 2016, MassDEP issued its approval of the Partial Phase II. This letter identified many deficiencies in the Phase II Report and indicated that the deficiencies should be addressed in the Phase III or that a schedule for collecting data to address the deficiencies should be provided. It does not seem that any of the deficiencies identified in MassDEP's March 11, 2016 <sup>letter</sup> have been addressed in the Phase III.
2. On July 15, 2016, MassDEP issued a letter providing comments and clarifications on the IRA Plan Modification. In that letter, DEP stated: "If it is determined that the active/passive free-product recovery system is not adequately removing the DNAPL, and therefore not achieving the objectives of the IRA to prevent the potential migration of DNAPL into the Acushnet River in response to the scheduled EPA dredging of the New Bedford Harbor, MassDEP may require that AVX implement a containment system to prevent migration of the DNAPL in response to EPA dredging." How will MassDEP consider this requirement in its evaluation of the Phase III? As discussed further below, the Phase III does not address DNAPL and, it appears, assumes that the IRA activities will adequately address DNAPL conditions. As EPA has expressed, we have reservations about the effectiveness of the proposed recovery systems to be implemented under the IRA at containing the DNAPL in the MW-15 area, a highly viscous, non-polar, separate phase liquid. FPR systems have not been shown to substantially remediate sites with DNAPL. They are moderately effective at removing DNAPL that enters the wells or trenches used for recovery, but not effective at promoting significant flow of DNAPL from the formation to the recovery system. If the proposed recovery system is ineffective at source control/containment of DNAPL, this may have significant implications on the effectiveness and constructability of the proposed permeable reactive barrier wall.
3. Interface with the Harbor Remediation: There is almost no mention of the ongoing remediation of harbor sediments by EPA, particularly the well-communicated fact that a significant amount of sediment directly adjacent to the Site is scheduled for removal. This needs to be taken into consideration when evaluating the type of barrier installed along the eastern Site boundary, i.e., is the geotechnical stability of a new barrier compatible with shoreline dredging. If a vertical barrier is installed as a part of the remedy, it will be important for the construction of the vertical barrier to include structural elements that will ensure that the wall maintains its integrity during implementation of the harbor excavation. The specific location of that barrier needs to be considered as well; if it is installed landward of the existing sheet pile wall, what is the intended plan for the material between the two barriers. Nearly all of this area is considered within a confirmed or potential DNAPL zone, i.e. even a relatively narrow band is expected to contain a significant amount of contamination that would eventually be released to the harbor if not removed or fully contained.

4. Monitoring Plan: A monitoring plan to address potential releases to the harbor during remedy construction, along with a long-term monitoring plan to address remedy effectiveness in perpetuity will be critical elements of the Phase IV. Key elements of these monitoring plans should be laid out in any approval of a Phase III remedial action plan.
5. TSCA Determination: The Phase III references the TSCA Determination that was issued for the NTCRA as the TSCA Determination for the Site, including referencing this as the TSCA Determination for the PCB contamination extending onto the Titleist property. Consistent with EPA's 8/29/16 email to Marilyn Wade, of Brown and Caldwell, this Determination was written specifically for the NTCRA and does not provide for approval of work conducted under the 21E program. For the 21E work to be compliant with TSCA, a separate review and approval process with EPA's TSCA program must be established in conjunction with the 21E process. For your information, EPA's TSCA program is communicating directly with AVX on this matter and will keep MassDEP apprised.
6. Detailed Evaluation of Alternatives: Discussions of the effectiveness of the proposed remedial alternatives for overburden groundwater were not comprehensive. In general, the ratings are subjective and did not appear to fully consider the possible effects of each alternative on the harbor cleanup efforts. In fact, it is not clear that the selected remedial alternative for overburden groundwater (OU3B-4) will be effective with respect to preventing contaminant migration to the river. Hydraulic containment has been used for a wide variety of sites and contaminants and does not have the level of uncertainty for effectiveness that a PRB would have. It would seem Alternative OU3B-2 and B-3 would be much more likely of achieving a permanent solution due to the presence of both an impermeable barrier and a hydraulic containment system.
7. Impacted Shallow Uncapped Soils, OU1: EPA has recent PCB sediment and soil PCB data for soils within the intertidal area and the shoreline of the Titleist property. Our sampling data extends to the east and south of the PCB contamination defined as OU1. EPA is in the process of preparing a transmittal letter to the property owner to share this information with them. As soon as we have communicated the data to the property owner and have their permission to share the data with MassDEP, AVX and the City, we will provide the data to all parties. This data clearly shows that AVX has not adequately delineated the extent of the impacted shallow soils on the Titleist property and that the shallow soils contamination extends beyond the fenced area where AVX limited its sample collection activities. Also note that AVX's sampling program provided for the collection of 2 foot soil intervals such that shallow soil samples were composited soils over the 0-2 ft depth interval. Higher concentrations in the 0-1 ft interval may not be identified when evaluated in a 0-2 ft composited soil interval. EPA's samples are based on 1 foot intervals (e.g., 0-1 ft, 1-2 ft).
8. DNAPL: The occurrence of DNAPL in the Site overburden and its potential impact on remedial approaches receives very limited discussion; it is not even included in the description of OU3. Although "NAPL" is identified as a media in Section 4.1.4 for the initial screening of remedial alternatives, DNAPL remedial considerations are not

otherwise developed in the Phase III. The figures of DNAPL area and cross section presented in Appendix A show a small DNAPL footprint contained within the site boundaries that is quite reduced over what had been presented previously by URS (October 2014) and does not include the area more recently identified by MIP-53 and MIP-54, nor does it account for EPA's data collection efforts for adjacent harbor sediments. There is no supporting discussion on the rationale for the reduction of the DNAPL zone area. Please also refer to EPA's 1/13/16 comments emailed to MassDEP on the Phase II, Comment 1, regarding the inadequate delineation of the extent of DNAPL. It is unclear why the accepted characterization guidance of Kueper and Davies (2009) of defining a confirmed/probable source zone and potential source zone has not been used to help inform the remedial alternatives assessment.

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9. Selection of Permeable Reactive Barrier Wall as an Element of the Remedy for Aerovox Property Overburden Groundwater, OU3B: EPA has significant concerns about the effectiveness and constructability of the PRB. Considering existing guidance and literature on PRBs, EPA has not found any information to support that a PRB will be effective at treating PCBs. PRBs can be effective at treatment of dissolved-phase CVOC groundwater plumes and are typically constructed at the downgradient edge of a dissolved-phase plume. At this Site, AVX is proposing to construct a PRB through a DNAPL source area and highly-contaminated CVOC and PCB co-mingled groundwater plume with the river immediately to the east in a system with brackish water where groundwater flow reverses twice-daily as a result of the tides. These significant complexities are not adequately accounted for in the effectiveness, reliability or implementability factors in the evaluation of the OU3B-4 alternative. Additional specific concerns with a PRB wall are as follows:

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- a. The PRB is proposed to be constructed almost as a "funnel-and-gate" system with impermeable vertical barriers preventing flow around the PRB. However, industry experience has shown that funnel-and-gate systems do not reliably direct groundwater flow through the PRB (i.e., "gate"). Therefore, effective installation of the PRB would likely require a longer PRB than assumed in the Phase II.
  - b. In recent years, zero-valent iron (ZVI) barriers have been shown to not last as long as previously thought (typically assumed to last for at least 30 years). It should not be assumed that a ZVI barrier will work and persist without significant testing to ensure that the groundwater geochemical conditions will not result in passivation or clogging of the ZVI and degradation of the efficacy of the iron. If a PRB is pursued, EPA recommends bench-scale testing of ZVI before selection of this remedy. Pilot testing of the wall is not the most effective method of evaluating this proof of concept.
  - c. The Phase III recognizes that replacement of the PRB may be required over the lifetime of the remedy. However, there is no estimate of the number of times refreshing the PRB will be required. There do not appear to be costs included in the estimates for refreshing the PRB in the rating of this alternative.
  - d. The evaluation of the effectiveness of the PRB with respect to preventing migration of dissolved PCBs did not appear to consider the possibility that

migration may be facilitated by dissolved organic material, potentially including the organic material proposed for inclusion in the PRB design.

- e. It appears that the PRB was conceptualized to be constructed using material with a hydraulic conductivity similar to or greater than that of the aquifer materials. In practice, this can be difficult to accomplish. If the hydraulic conductivity of the PRB is significantly less than the aquifer, groundwater elevations upgradient of the PRB will increase and likely result in additional contaminant migration from the overburden, through the bedrock, and into the harbor. Alternatively, if the hydraulic conductivity is higher, this could increase communication between the aquifer and the Acushnet River.
- f. One-pass trenching can be an effective method of PRB installation, however it is unclear whether this method would be able to match the contours of the top of the bedrock and ensure a good "seal" along the top of the rock. The deep overburden will tend to be the zone that conducts the highest concentrations of DNAPL COCs. The remedy should include provisions to prevent a gap in the barrier at the bottom.
- g. How will performance be measured and monitored? What provisions will there be for further actions if the PRB is not performing as designed and there is breakthrough to the east into the harbor?

Given these concerns, the ultimate performance of the PRB should be considered to be uncertain. How will a determination be made regarding whether a PRB wall will be effective and what role does MassDEP play in that determination? If MassDEP has information (e.g., guidance, literature, case studies) that addresses EPA's concerns with the PRB and that MassDEP may rely on for approval of the selected OU3B-4 remedy, please provide that information for EPA consideration. If, based on the MassDEP's evaluation of the Phase III or results of the Pilot Studies, a determination is made that a PRB wall will not be effective, what are the next steps under the MCP and 21E program? Will MassDEP have the authority to require selection of one of the other, more technically practicable but more costly alternatives, like OU3B-3?

10. Bedrock Transport Pathway: The proposed ~~selected~~ remedy is dependent on adequate contaminant treatment in bedrock, since there would be no effort to prevent groundwater flow from bedrock to the river. Based on review of bedrock hydrology adjacent to the Acushnet River, it appears that a significant portion of the contaminated bedrock aquifer is in good hydraulic communication with the river.

With respect to control of contaminant migration from the site to the harbor, it would appear that a low permeability vertical barrier extending some depth into the bedrock and combined with groundwater extraction for hydraulic gradient control, would be significantly more effective for controlling bedrock groundwater.

Specific Comments:

1. Section 2.4.1, page 2-6, and Section 3.4, page 3-4: Please refer to EPA's 1/13/16 comments emailed to MassDEP on the Phase II, Comment 2, on groundwater. AVX continues to make the same statements in the Phase III as were made in the Phase II CSA to imply that AVX is incorrectly relying on the Harbor cleanup to avoid its 21E

obligation to fully address groundwater migration. Further, footnote 1 on page 2-6 and footnote 3 on page 3-4 references the New Bedford Harbor ROD as setting remedial goals/standards for PCBs in the harbor. The ROD sets remedial goals for PCBs in sediment. The discussion in these sections of the Phase III are on groundwater concentrations. The ROD does not set remedial goals for groundwater.

2. Section 3.4, page 3-4: The 3<sup>rd</sup> paragraph states: “Groundwater analytical data indicated that deep overburden groundwater exceeds the Method 1 GW-3 standards for PCBs and TCE.” (emphasis added) Pursuant to the Phase II, both shallow and deep overburden groundwater exceeded Method 1 GW-3 standards for PCBs and TCE. The discussion concludes with the statement on a potential discharge of groundwater with elevated contaminant concentrations. The mass flux evaluation approach presented for the bedrock system in Section 3.5 should be applied to the overburden system to estimate contaminant loadings to the harbor.
3. Section 3.4, page 3-5, third bullet: Why is achieving a “stable” plume in bedrock groundwater a remedial action goal when the current (and likely stable) form of the plume is resulting in a discharge of contaminants to the harbor?
4. Section 3.5.1, page 3-6, first full paragraph: The method for determining the hydraulic gradient is unclear; it refers to a mean, but only notes one low and high tide figure. The most appropriate approach would be a time weighted average over several tidal cycles representative of spring and neap tides.
5. Section 3.5.1: The Mass Flux Evaluation was limited to TCE “because this constituent is the most widespread and has been detected at the highest concentrations in bedrock water-bearing fractures.” The Phase III then states that: “Although PCBs have been detected above UCLs in one bedrock well (MW-15B), PCBs have much lower mobility and therefore were not considered a driver for the mass flux calculations.” EPA does not agree with AVX’s rationale for limiting the mass flux evaluation to TCE. As noted in the report, PCBs are above the UCL in MW-15B, immediately adjacent to the river, and PCBs co-located with CVOCs are mobile. In addition, pursuant to the Phase II, average groundwater concentrations exceeding the Method 3 GW-3 standard for PCBs were found in bedrock wells MW-2B, MW-6B, MW-13B, MW-15B, and MW-17B. The Phase III compares the calculated TCE pore water concentration to the Method 1 GW-3 standard for TCE of 5,000 ug/L to conclude that active remediation of bedrock groundwater is not required to reduce concentrations in pore water in the sediments beneath the river. However, the Method 1 GW-3 standard for PCBs is 10 ug/L, a much more stringent comparative criteria. In addition, the National Recommended Water Quality Criteria for PCBs for protection of aquatic life in 0.03 ug/L. EPA recommends that the mass flux evaluation address PCBs and other COCs to evaluate impacts from bedrock groundwater to sediments beneath the river. Further, although not explicitly stated in the text, the calculation presented in Appendix B estimates that over 260 pounds of TCE (along with an unspecified mass of associated PCBs) would be released annually into harbor pore water. Given the high organic content of estuarine sediments, contaminants entering the sediment pore water system via groundwater discharge are

expected to preferentially bind to the organic matter resulting in recontamination of harbor sediments.

6. Section 4.3.3.1, OU3A: Two locations north of the sheet pile wall, MIP-54 and MIP-53, have shallow PCB concentrations of 30,500 and 20,500 mg/kg, respectively. In the case of MIP-53, there is no peat noted in the boring log. These are some of the highest concentrations in soil on the Aerovox site and these soils are not bounded to the east by a sheet pile wall and may not be bounded vertically by a peat layer. These locations are not addressed as part of OU3A remedy so this high level of contamination is unaddressed by the Phase III.
1. Section 4.3.3.1, OU3A, page 4-10: Three alternatives are identified and all include containment in the form of caps, an engineered barrier over contaminated soils. There is no discussion of containment of soils to the east so they do not cross-contaminate water and sediments in the Harbor. Soils on the eastern side of the site are vulnerable to sloughing into the harbor as the peat deteriorates and the sheet pile wall falls into disrepair. **Containment of soils on the eastern boundary needs to be addressed.** If the comprehensive remedy will rely on the current sheet pile wall to be an effective barrier, an evaluation on its viability to serve as an engineering control while excavations are planned adjacent to it must be performed. Please refer to EPA's significant concerns with the effectiveness of the existing sheet pile wall detailed in our comments on the IRA Status Report #4 emailed to MassDEP on 9/22/15.
7. Section 4.3.3.2, Alternative OU3B-4:
- The OU3B-4 alternative discussion states: "Most of the COC mass in the groundwater is expected to be TCE and therefore the primary function of the PRB media will be degradation by ZVI..." As documented in the Phase II, groundwater is contaminated with CVOCs and PCBs. EPA suggests in comments herein that AVX calculate the mass of PCBs in overburden and bedrock groundwater. EPA does not concur with the implication that the mass of PCBs in groundwater migrating to the river do not need to be controlled.
  - The selected remedy for OU3B includes biological remediation of the source soils which contain both mobile and residual DNAPL. Further, this DNAPL is a mixture of CVOCs and PCBs. Enhanced reductive dechlorination (ERD) is not guaranteed to eliminate all of the DNAPL within this zone, certainly not within the projected timeframe of "approximately 10 years". Thus, control of the flux of COCs from the site should be assumed to be needed for more than 10 years. It appears that the ERD element of the remedial alternative for OU3 groundwater is expected to reduce the PCB concentrations within the deep overburden. However, PCBs are not reliably remediated using ERD. [Note, Section 4.1.1.1 states in-situ soil bioremediation and chemical oxidation are "not effective for PCBs".]
8. Section 4.2.4: In Section 4.1.2.1, containment was retained as an alternative for groundwater. However, the OU4 bedrock groundwater alternatives presented in the

summary of remedial alternatives did not consider containment in any of the alternatives evaluated for the bedrock groundwater.

9. Section 5.3.1.5, page 5-8: The rating appears to more heavily weigh short-term risks during construction and diminishes risks posed by leaving soils above UCLs at the site.
10. Section 5.3.1.8, page 5-8: Considering the City's comments on the preliminary Phase III, the "very good" rating for this non-pecuniary factor should be reconsidered.
- RM 11. Section 5.3.2.4, page 5-10: The Phase III notes: "OU3B-3 has a poor cost rating due to the highest cost to implement and even greater energy consumption than OU3B-2 due to the additional in situ treatment of soil." However, the 30 year net worth of OU3B-3 is lower than OU3B-2 noted in the table. This seems to imply that OU3B-3 has a lower energy consumption over time than OU3B-2, which contradicts the statement in the text.
11. Section 6.3.2, page 6-3: The Phase III indicates that OU3B-3 has a moderate to high-likelihood of achieving a Permanent Solution while OU3B-4 has a high likelihood of achieving a Permanent solution. This should be reconsidered in light of potential issues with PRBs noted above.
12. Section 8.2.2: What are the protocols for evaluating the results of the Pilot Studies proposed for evaluation of the treatment elements of OU3B-4, the Permeable Reactive Barrier Wall and In-Situ Treatment of Hot Spots? How will monitoring be performed, particularly considering the levels of contamination that exists on both sides of where the pilot wall is proposed and the reversing groundwater flow directions that result from tidal influence? Consistent with the additional comments noted herein, EPA has significant reservations about the technical practicability and constructability of the permeable reactive barrier wall proposed for this Site. ★
13. Appendix C: Groundwater Modeling: It is noted that a groundwater flow model was developed for use in the remedy evaluations presented in the Phase III. Ultimately, if some form of low permeability containment or in-situ permeable reaction barrier is employed for the remedy, the groundwater model will provide one tool for design and assessment of the remedial system. As such, it is recommended that the groundwater model be subjected to a more comprehensive review to better evaluate its reliability to support these objectives. The following issues appear to limit the ability of the current model formulation to represent the actual conditions of groundwater flow:
- a. The assignment of hydraulic conductivity values for the various formation units included within the model are based on a sparse set of slug tests or other evaluations for existing wells throughout the aquifer. As an example, the following wells delineate a north-south transect of locations within the overburden and bedrock aquifers immediately upgradient and parallel to the existing sheet pile wall: MW-15D, MW-15B, MW-07A, MW-07, MW-07B, MW-02A, MW-02, MW-02B, MW-17D, MW-17B and MW-32B. Based on review of

the Phase II Comprehensive Site Assessment, it appears that only three of these wells have been subjected to any testing to assess the ability of aquifer materials to transmit groundwater.

- b. The lateral extent of the projected peat layer does not fully correspond with data from the Phase II CSA. Specifically, data from boring locations MIP45, MIP46 and MIP47 revealed no detectable peat interval. Given the observed locations of high contaminant concentrations that potentially migrate to the Acushnet River occurring in a north-south aerial band on the property that parallels the shoreline, it is important that the distribution of hydrogeologic units incorporated within the three-dimensional model domain represent site conditions. The construction of the model domain will influence the results of the model calibration, including the appropriate numerical value assigned to the vertical conductivity of the modeled unit containing peat.
- c. Insufficient detail is provided to assess the quality of the steady-state model calibration results. While a comparison of observed and modeled groundwater elevation is provided (Appendix C, Figure 1-7), there is no accompanying documentation for the examined wells to facilitate evaluation of potential systematic bias that should be used to ascertain the adequacy of the assumed model domain construction.